

Remarks Announcing Anticancer Initiatives October 27, 1996

The President. Thank you so much. Thank you. First of all, thank you all for joining me on this beautiful, beautiful Sunday afternoon to discuss our common efforts to fight cancer.

I want to thank Secretary Shalala and Dr. Susan Blumenthal for their tireless service on behalf of women throughout America. I thank Dr. Harold Varmus, the Director of the National Institutes of Health; Dr. Richard Klausner, the Director of the National Cancer Institute; and Dr. Stephen Joseph, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health. They have all been instrumental in the efforts we are here to talk about today.

And thank you, Jane Reese-Coulbourne, for your courage, your dedication, your willingness to come up here and make a public statement today that represents the feelings, the convictions, the interests, and the hopes of millions and millions of people throughout the United States. Let me thank all the survivors and advocates who are here today and who fight the battle against cancer every day for all the rest of us.

Our Nation is only as strong as our families are healthy. I have devoted a lot of time and thought to the question of what we need to do to help strong families survive and thrive and increase as we move into the 21st century. We have to help more people succeed at home and at work. But clearly, we have to help people live as long and as well as they can and then help families have the support they need when their family members are ill. That's why I was glad to sign the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill to preserve health insurance options for people when a family member has been sick; why I was proud to sign the bill that bans insurance companies from forcing mothers and their newborn babies out of the hospital after 24 hours; why in our new balanced budget there are funds for more regular mammograms for women on Medicare and funds to give respite care for families who are caring for members with Alzheimer's.

We have an enormous opportunity as we stand on the brink of this new century to take advantage of scientific possibilities, to help people live as long, as well as they can, and to build stronger families in the process. Nothing

is more devastating to a family's strength than when someone is diagnosed with a life-threatening disease like cancer. As Jane said, I know about this from my own family's experience, and nearly every family does. This year alone nearly 1.4 million American men, women, and children will be diagnosed with some kind of cancer. This is the 25th anniversary of the National Cancer Act, and in those 25 years we've come a long way in the fight.

This month is also Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a time to remember the terrible toll breast cancer has taken, to assess our progress, to redouble our efforts to find a cure. That's why I wanted us to come together today, to talk about the new steps we are taking in the fight against cancer, and breast cancer in particular.

Since I took office we have mounted a comprehensive campaign to prevent and treat cancer. We are working to get tobacco out of our children's lives forever. We have accelerated FDA approval of cancer drugs and made it easier for patients to obtain promising therapies before they are formally approved. The Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Defense, NASA, and the CIA have all joined forces to develop cutting edge imaging technology for the early detection of cancer.

Most important of all, as has been said, we've increased spending on cancer research, treatment, and prevention by some \$400 million. In the battle against breast cancer we've increased funding for research and prevention by nearly 80 percent since 1993. We launched a public awareness campaign to encourage older women to use Medicare to have mammograms. And my balanced budget goes even further, as I said. It will guarantee free annual mammograms to Medicare beneficiaries, removing all financial barriers that prevent some women from obtaining this vitally important test.

We are making progress. The survival rate has gone up. Seven out of ten children with cancer survive it; that's up from one out of ten just 25 years ago. The death rate for breast cancer has gone down every year in the last 7, has dropped by nearly 8 percent since 1990. Just last week, the NIH announced a milestone

in the human genome project, which is identifying the location and function of nearly every human gene. We've now mapped out 20 percent of all human genes, and anyone can use that map on the Internet. Soon we will know the genes that contribute to cancer and our genetic predisposition to inherit it and possibly then be able to prevent it before it strikes.

But as far as we have come, we still have far to go. We must continue to build on our progress and strengthen our efforts. Today I announced three new steps to bring us closer to a cure and to improve the lives of those who do survive.

First, we know that genetic research may be the key to understanding and curing breast cancer. In the last 2 years, scientists have discovered two genes that indicate susceptibility to breast cancer. This remarkable discovery is giving hope to women everywhere. Last month I signed a budget that reflects our values in devoting substantial resources to cancer research. Today I'm announcing we are directing \$30 million of that new budget to support and expand breast cancer genetic research at hospitals, universities, and labs all across America. This step represents a major increase in breast cancer genetic research. It will ensure the development of this promising new research and bring us that much closer to a cure.

Second, we must all use the technology and we must use all the technology at our disposal to give women the information they need about breast cancer. We must unite the forces of the public and private sectors to achieve that goal. That's why I'm pleased to announce the launch of the new National Action Plan on Breast Cancer website on the Internet. This is easily accessible. The website address is right over there. It will answer the questions women have about early detection, clinical trials, and much more.

And finally, there's no greater proof of the progress we've made than the more than 10 million Americans who have survived cancer. Many have special psychological, physical, and health care counseling needs that we are only beginning to understand. Some face recurrence of their illness. Some can't get health insurance. I'm proud to have passed landmark legislation to guarantee that cancer survivors will no longer

live in fear of losing that health insurance just because they have a preexisting condition.

Today I announced that this Friday, November 1st, the National Cancer Institute will open its new Office of Cancer Survivorship. The office will support much needed research that will help cancer survivors deal with the problems they face even after their cancer is cured. Dr. Anna Meadows will be the Director of the Office of Cancer Survivorship, and I thank her for her willingness to do this ground-breaking service on behalf of people with cancer who have survived it all across America.

These steps help us to put science at the service of our families and say we will do whatever it takes to continue the fight until there is a cure for cancer. And we will do everything we can to improve the lives of those who do survive.

Just a few moments ago I signed a piece of the Ribbon of Hope. This yellow ribbon, which is already over 750 feet long in its entirety, has been signed by more than 10,000 cancer survivors around the world. The First Lady was the first person to sign the ribbon, and I was honored to place my own signature alongside that of so many courageous people. The ribbon is a symbol of the hope that sustains people in their struggle with cancer. It is also a symbol of the progress we have made and the progress still to come in our common fight.

And now I'd like to present that piece of the Ribbon of Hope that I signed to Erin Schraibman, herself a cancer survivor, a very brave young girl whom I have very much enjoyed meeting today.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

[At this point, the President presented the ribbon to Ms. Schraibman.]

The President. We're adjourned.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:20 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jane Reese-Coulbourne, executive vice president, National Breast Cancer Coalition. The National Breast Cancer Awareness Month proclamation of October 3 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.